

# DO-IT-YOURSELF WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY

JAMES BOOTH



## INTRODUCTION

# DO IT YOURSELF WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY

In November of 2003, I attended the wedding of my wife's oldest nephew. He and his fiancé both work full time and go to school, so they don't have a lot of money, and neither do their parents.

Regardless, they managed to have a very nice wedding with the money they did have available. Fortunately for Mike and Wendi, a family friend and semi-professional photographer (not yours truly) agreed to do their wedding.

On the way home from the reception it occurred to me that a lot of couples are in the same position of not having a lot of money for their wedding. Mike and Wendi were lucky to have a photographer to call on, but not everyone will have this asset.

A wedding is one of the biggest expenses a couple will generate, and parents can't always be counted on to help defray the cost. Many times, expenses will need to be cut and some aspects of a wedding lend themselves to budget cuts more than others.

For the budget-conscious wedding, the photography is frequently one of the things to suffer. As there is no shortage of people taking pictures at a wedding, often the couple will just figure on using the pictures taken by their guests. One practice I've seen is to place disposable cameras on each table at the reception.

Virtually everyone knows somebody that has a camera and these people are often called upon to fill the role of the wedding photographer when the budget is tight. In all likelihood, these friends or family members really have no idea how to go about shooting a wedding.

Does this mean the couple should have to settle for amateur photographs of the beginning of their life together? No, it doesn't.

Just because a couple doesn't have a lot of money to spend on their wedding doesn't mean they shouldn't still have quality, professional-looking photos.

On reflection, I realized that shooting a wedding isn't that difficult, per se. It's basically just a series of staged shots that anyone can do with a bit of guidance. It's the seriousness of the occasion that is the most intimidating factor.

I've been in, or involved with, a lot of weddings and seen a lot of wedding photography. I've seen what works and what doesn't and thought I would share that knowledge with those friends and family members that have agreed to take on the responsibility of photographing a wedding.

That's how the idea of my amateur guide for wedding photography was born.

I was very fortunate to be able to work with Gary Maiers of Robin Gary Photography. Gary is a seasoned wedding photographer with a solid reputation in my area. He was very kind to supply all of the photos that I used.

Thank you, Gary.

James Booth  
May 2004

James Booth is the News Editor for the ZATZ publications and Contributing Editor for Connected Photographer and Computing Unplugged Magazines. James is a Jack-Of-Many-Trades and Master of absolutely nothing. All of his computer and handheld experience is self-taught through trial-and-error. He is a stay-at-home Mr. Mom that enjoys reading, Asian culture and martial arts, exotic foods, golf and his saltwater fish tank as a surrogate for scuba diving.

James also dabbles in digital graphics and is an intermediate-level photographer. By far, the light of his life is his daughter Elizabeth. Computing Unplugged Magazine is James' first foray into writing for publication. He can be reached at [lizardworks@mchsi.com](mailto:lizardworks@mchsi.com).

All photos in this guide are courtesy of Gary Maiers of Robin Gary Photography in Moline, IL. After twenty years in marketing, Gary opened his own studio, and with his wife JoAnn, has specialized in wedding photography for the last twelve years. Gary left film behind three years ago and has been strictly digital since.

His work can be seen at <http://www.robingary.net>.

Special thanks go to Gary and JoAnn for their help with this guide.

**Production note:** Due to production requirements on our server, all the images provided have been converted to .GIF format, and therefore are not at their optimal viewing quality. Gary's pictures are, in reality, of much higher quality.

# CHAPTER 1

# PREPARING YOUR EQUIPMENT

Not everyone has the budget to hire a professional photographer and must rely on a friend or family member that owns a good camera to document their wedding. Just because someone can't afford a professional photographer doesn't mean they shouldn't have nice wedding pictures. These are the photographers this guide is aimed at.

With the exception of the day their children are born, there is likely no other day in a couple's life that is more important than their wedding day.

And invariably something will go wrong, it always does. Is this really something you want to be a part of? I certainly don't, I know better.

Don't get me wrong; I'm not against marriage. I like it so well I've done it twice myself. Neither am I against the wedding photographer. As a matter of fact, there is no photographer I respect more than the wedding photographer, with the possible exception of the child photographer. There is no way on Earth I would want to take on that kind of responsibility.

I myself have been approached on several occasions to photograph weddings, but have always been smart enough to decline no matter how much compensation was involved. I'm just not confident enough in my own skill to take on that momentous task. The way my luck goes, I would be the one thing at the wedding that got screwed up. It would be my fault that the day was ruined and there were no memories of this most important of days.

Even though I've never actually played the role of the wedding photographer, I have personally been in quite a few weddings and been involved with many more. I am more than familiar with the role of the wedding photographer and with what works and what doesn't. With that in mind, I may have a few nuggets that will help you out.

If you're already a professional wedding photographer then I'm sure there is very little, if anything, you could learn from me. I'll defer to your proven expertise, and if I don't know what I'm talking about, then send me an email and let me know.

## PREPARATION 101

Whether you're using actual film or digital "film," you'll want to make sure you have enough. However much you think you'll need, double it. Then triple it again. It's much better to have too much and not need it than to run short. You'll be going for quantity in order to achieve quality.

Besides, it's not like you can't use the extra film later. If you're fortunate enough to be using a medium-format camera and have more than one film carrier, enlist an assistant to load the spare film carriers while you shoot. It will save time when you've finished a roll and need to reload.

If you're using a digital camera, make sure to have extra media of whatever kind the camera takes, (i.e., SD card, Memory Stick, CDR, whatever). Again, it's better to have too much than not enough. You never know when one of those cards or CDs is going to be corrupt. You don't want to be stuck without extras. Gary tells me he goes through six CompactFlash cards per wedding. Connected Photographer recommends you have at least 2GB of on-hand media before you even consider wedding coverage.

The same goes for batteries. Make sure you put fresh batteries in your camera before you leave and have at least one set of brand new extras. Your camera's flash is something else that will need batteries. Flash equipment can eat up batteries pretty quick, so make sure you have plenty on hand. Connected Photographer recommends you bring at least four sets of fully charged batteries to the event.

## **PREPARATION 202**

Preparation is one thing that can't be stressed enough. Check your equipment before you leave the house. Test it and check it again. This includes cleaning the lenses, mirrors, focusing screens, and penta-prisms if appropriate.

Make sure all your contacts are clean, that your flashes fire and cycle appropriately, and that any slave flashes are working. If you use any type of remote shutter release, such as a bulb activator or an IR remote, make sure they're functioning properly (and also have spare batteries, if necessary).

Take everything you think you might possibly need. None of us like to lug around unnecessary equipment, but when you're in the trenches you don't want to realize you need something you don't have. After you've shot a few weddings, if you choose to continue doing them, you'll know what you need and what you don't.

Believe it or not, an inexpensive tripod will go a long way to improving the shots that don't have to be hand held. I know I can't hold a camera steady even if my life depended on it. I rely on my tripod as a necessary extension of the camera.

Gary suggests investing in a good external flash. He says an on-camera flash is only good for about 15 ft., whereas an external one will extend that range to 30 to 40 feet. "It's all in the lighting," he says. When you get to the wedding site, check your equipment again.

So far, all of these tips would apply to basically any shoot that you would be doing and are not wedding specific. I think they're a good refresher because sometimes we can overlook the simplest things in trying to prepare for every eventuality.

## CHAPTER 2

# SCOUTING THE LOCATION

When you get to the wedding site, be it church, park, someone's house or back yard, thoroughly check out the entire location for possibilities. There are the standard shots that will be taken at the altar, but not everything has to be done there.

Each location is different and some may offer unique opportunities, like the location shown in Figure A.

**FIGURE A**



The smokestack on this riverboat provides an interesting setting.

When you've staked out your primary shooting location, gather your equipment nearby, and make sure your assistant if you have one, is also close at hand, so that anything you might want will be easily available.

## CHAPTER 3

# DEVELOPING YOUR BEFORE-THE-CEREMONY BATTLE PLAN

We all like to make things easier for ourselves and there was never more of an occasion to make things as easy as possible than when photographing a wedding. Of all the weddings I have been involved with, there was one very simple thing I've seen that makes the photographer's job much simpler, and that is to take the photos before the ceremony.

Some brides, or grooms for that matter, can be rather old fashioned when it comes to seeing the bride before the wedding. If their mind is set on not seeing one another before the ceremony, don't fret. You can still take nearly half the photos before. You'll just have to work out a system whereby you get all the men together and get their pictures done, and then do the same with the women. The combined photos can then be done afterwards.

Here's the logic in doing as many of the photos as possible ahead of time. If you get to the location early enough, you can scout it out and take your time setting up while everyone is getting ready, rather than rush after the ceremony. After the ceremony, everyone is itching to get moving and go to the reception. People become impatient and sometimes downright rude, which is not going to improve your performance any, especially if you have an equipment problem.

Speaking of equipment problems, it's much better to have these before the wedding, when there is still time to come up with a solution, than when everyone is standing around after the ceremony and waiting for you to finish so they can get to the reception. Also, if at all possible, you only want to set your equipment up one time.

You can even stipulate as part of your agreement to do the photos that they must be done before the wedding, or at least a portion of them. You would not believe how much of a relief it is to you and the bridal party to have the photos done before the ceremony. That's just one less thing everyone has to worry about.

## **KNOW YOUR SHOT PLAN**

We've now reached the point where you're actually going to be taking photos. First though, as part of your preparation, you should make a list, an outline, or timeline of the photos you want to take. In the same way a movie director builds a storyboard to help her plan the flow of the movie, your rough outline will help you as you're doing your day's shoot.



The shoot will flow much more smoothly if you already know what your next shot will be. This outline should be laid out in groups, such as what poses to use with just the girls and which ones with just the men. It makes it so much easier to transition from one shot to the next and there will be less work on your part in posing the subjects.

There are the "old standards" of wedding photography and I will cover a good bit of them here, but don't be afraid to research other possibilities by looking in wedding and photo magazines. Don't be afraid to use your own inspiration either. In Figure A, Gary used the bride's train as a backdrop.

**FIGURE A**



The train of the bride's dress provides a ready backdrop.

## GET CREATIVE

If you're any kind of photographer at all then you have some element of creativity. You never know, you may see a setting that gives you an idea, as in Figure B, which takes the bride and groom outdoors.

**FIGURE B**



Don't limit yourself to indoor settings.



In one case, there was a wedding near the river, so getting up onto the riverboat itself will make a memorable image, as shown in Figure C.

**FIGURE C**



The bridge of this riverboat makes an interesting and fun setting.

In the next few chapters, I'll cover what you should be doing and the shots you should be taking leading up to the ceremony.

## CHAPTER 4

# THE GETTING READY PICTURES

One classic early shot you'll take is the bride and her party getting ready, like in Figure A.

**FIGURE A**



Pictures of the bride getting ready are classics.

These are kind of a standard in wedding photography. You'll want shots of her getting advice from her mother, grandmother, aunts and girlfriends as well as applying make-up and fixing hair, putting on the dress and garter, etc. What you'll be allowed to shoot greatly depends on the preferences of the bride, herself.

The same approach applies for shots of the groom and his party getting ready, but that isn't always possible. Many times, the men won't all get ready at the same time and in the same place as the bride.

If they do, this makes it so much easier to get preparation shots of both parties. If not then you may have to sacrifice those shots of the men in favor of the bride. As a general rule, when you

have to make a choice of shooting the bride or the groom, tradition maintains you should get more shots of the bride.

## THE MEN

You can often get shots of the men together just before the ceremony, as in Figure B, if you can't take any of them getting prepared.

**FIGURE B**



You never know what you'll catch while the men are hanging out before the wedding.

Another classic shot is of the groom getting advice from Dad. This makes such a good shot that you might even consider staging it. If you're not sure how to pose it, simply ask the dad to straighten the groom's tie. That one is a classic, like the one shown in Figure C.



**FIGURE C**



The father and groom together are a wedding standard.

At some point the groom and best man will probably converse alone, off in a corner. This also makes a good shot.

## THE WOMEN

If the bride and her party are getting ready at the site of the wedding, which is common practice, arrival shots of them in their street clothes hauling in their gear is another good shot, like the one shown in Figure D.

**FIGURE D**



Catch the bride's arrival, before she's in the gown.

At this time you can also take the exterior shots of the location and then set up your equipment in your primary location.

Next, I'll cover shots that are all pretty much standards when it comes to wedding photography. Since men get ready much faster than women, because there's less for us to do to get ready, you will be able to knock out the men-only shots while the women are doing their thing.



## CHAPTER 5

# GROUP SHOTS

Group shots are another staple of wedding photography. The couple will want shots of the groom with the best man, with the best man and groomsmen, like Figure A, with his parents, grandparents, and siblings, possibly with the bride's family,

**FIGURE A**



You can take this shot of the men while the women are getting ready.

Later, you'll want pictures of the groom with the maid of honor and bridesmaids, but this will have to wait until they're ready. You can throw in a few fun ones too. This is where you can let your (and the wedding party's) imagination flow.



You'll want the same group shots with the bride as in Figure B.

**FIGURE B**



Pictures of the women are always the highlight of the shoot.

Shoot the bride with the maid of honor, with the maid of honor and bridesmaids, with the flower girl and ring bearer if any, with her parents, grandparents and siblings, possibly with the groom's family, with any other people that are important to her as there will be, and with the best man and groomsmen who will already be there and ready.

Again, this one can be an opportunity for fun as well, like this picture of this woman being lifted by the guys, as seen in Figure C.

**FIGURE C**



You can take fun shots too.

At this point everyone will be ready and hopefully you will still have some time to finish the staged shots before the wedding. Now that everyone is together, you will want to repeat the above standards, only this time with the bride and groom together, combining the shots.

## **THE WEDDING PARTY**

Some classic pictures include the bride and groom flanked by their parents, the grandparents, siblings, entire family, the entire wedding party as in Figure D

**FIGURE D**



Here are two variations on the standard shot of the wedding party.



Don't forget the ushers, candle lighters, singers, speakers, etc. Then of course there is the standard shot of the rings, and with the bride and groom's hands together, like Figure E.

**FIGURE E**



Shots of the rings can be done several ways.

At this point everyone will retire back to his or her preparation areas. You can get a few shots of the decorations and the empty location if you haven't already. Then it will be time to take your gear down. From this point on, your shots will be handheld, unless there's a convenient, out of the way spot you can set your tripod to get shots of everyone coming down the aisle. You can use your assistant, or someone else nearby, as a target to pre-focus the lens at whatever spot you're going to take the shot.

## CHAPTER 6

# TENDER (OR FUNNY) MOMENTS

The wedding will be starting soon, so after your gear is stowed, find the bride's father. You're often likely to be able to get pre-ceremony jitters on film, as in Figure A and that's always a good shot.

**FIGURE A**



The bride's dad is fretting about the time.

If you see anything at any point that looks like a tender or touching moment, snap it like the great image shown in Figure B.

**FIGURE B**



Be on the lookout for tender moments, like this toned example.

Of course, the color adjustments are either done with a filter or in Photoshop at a later time.

In the next few chapters, I will cover the ceremony itself, the reception, and your follow-up duties afterwards.

## CHAPTER 7

# PHOTOGRAPHING THE CEREMONY

In earlier chapters, I covered how to prep your equipment and the shots to take before the actual ceremony begins. In the next few chapters, I'll cover the ceremony itself, the reception and that special time after the wedding.

### THE CEREMONY

This is it: the main event. Everything that happens over the next hour or so will only happen once, so make sure to catch it and make every shot count.

The ceremony itself is really one of the easiest and most straightforward parts of shooting a wedding. Basically, you want to catch a couple of shots of every person as they enter the chapel, or wherever the actual ceremony is taking place, and everything else that happens.

This means the parents and grandparents, groom and groomsmen, flower girl, ring bearer, bridesmaids, and oh yes, the bride. She'd probably appreciate a shot or two of her father walking her down the aisle. Make sure you get a picture of the father giving her to the groom like you can see in Figure A. Don't forget to take shots of any musicians, singers, speakers or anything or anyone else that is a special part of the ceremony, such as the lighting of a Unity candle.

**FIGURE A**



The parents giving away the bride is a wedding standard.



After the wedding, you might want to go into Photoshop and straighten the picture, and do any other simple adjustments necessary for a crisp shot. However, we'd recommend you give the newly married couple their choice of both the original image and the retouched image. Sometimes the "on-the-fly" look seems more real.

You now will now have your best opportunity during the entire ceremony to get shots of the bride and groom as they will be in the same spot and position for about half an hour. Depending on the layout of the location, and the policy of the person officiating, you should try to get shots of the exchange of vows from every possible angle.

Not every wedding officiator will allow flash photography during the ceremony. If not, you'll have to use available light. The straight-on shot is kind of a given, but if you can get shots from the far left and far right, you may be able to catch the bride and groom's faces during the exchange of vows.

It all depends on how they're positioned. You have to get the exchange of rings like Figure B.

**FIGURE B**



A shot of the ring exchange is a must.

Of course, an official photo of the kiss as in Figure C. Since this is the end of the actual ceremony, the officiator will present the couple and the party will exit the chapel. Make sure to capture all of this. This is essentially the reverse of the entry, so handle it the same way and catch everyone in the party as they exit.

**FIGURE C**



Of course, the kiss is a mandatory picture.

The receiving line generally comes next. I don't personally recall ever seeing a photographer covering the receiving line, but that doesn't mean it doesn't happen. You'll have to discuss this with the couple beforehand.

After the receiving line, you will need to finish up any of the formal shots that couldn't be done prior to the ceremony and then get the departing shots of the couple with the tossing of the birdseed, rice, confetti, streamers, bubbles or whatever they have chosen to use.



One special tip: this is a good time to be sure you have lens cleaner. Sometimes all that stuff being tossed can get on your lens. A quick clean can make all the difference!

If you don't have to cover the receiving line, this would be a good time to set your equipment back up if you still have formals to do. Sometimes, if you still have a lot of shots to take before the reception, you'll have to do the departing shots, like the one shown in Figure D, first so the guests can leave, then finish your formal shots.

**FIGURE D**



How many members of the wedding party can you fit into a limousine?

And now, on to the reception...

## CHAPTER 8

# THE RECEPTION

Perk up! If you've made it this far you're almost done. Fortunately, you won't have to stay for the entire reception. At some point the formality will devolve and things will begin to get silly.

You'll want to hang around long enough to catch a little silliness on film, then you can call it a night. If you're a friend of the family and you want to stay for the full run of festivities, store your camera gear away somewhere safe, and make sure you've got a designated driver.

You'll want to capture the bridal party as they arrive at and enter the reception. Then, generally the feeding frenzy will begin. Seeing as how you're most likely a friend or family member, which is how you got roped into this gig in the first place, you should be entitled to a little feed too. But first, get some shots of the cake, like the one shown in Figure A, and get table settings while they're still pristine.

**FIGURE A**



Preserve the cake with a picture.

After everyone has pretty well stuffed their gullets, it will be time for the toasts. Be sure to get shots of all the toasts and the reaction of the wedding couple like the shot shown Figure B, and then its cake-cutting time.

**FIGURE B**



Be sure capture the toasts on film.

You'll want to capture the bride and groom cutting the cake and the subsequent feeding of the cake, or smearing of the cake in the face, whichever it is. Figure C shows the couple sharing champagne. All the sugar in that frosting is going to provide the fuel for the goofiness to come. When the cake is finished, then usually the dancing will begin and you're looking down the home stretch.

**FIGURE C**

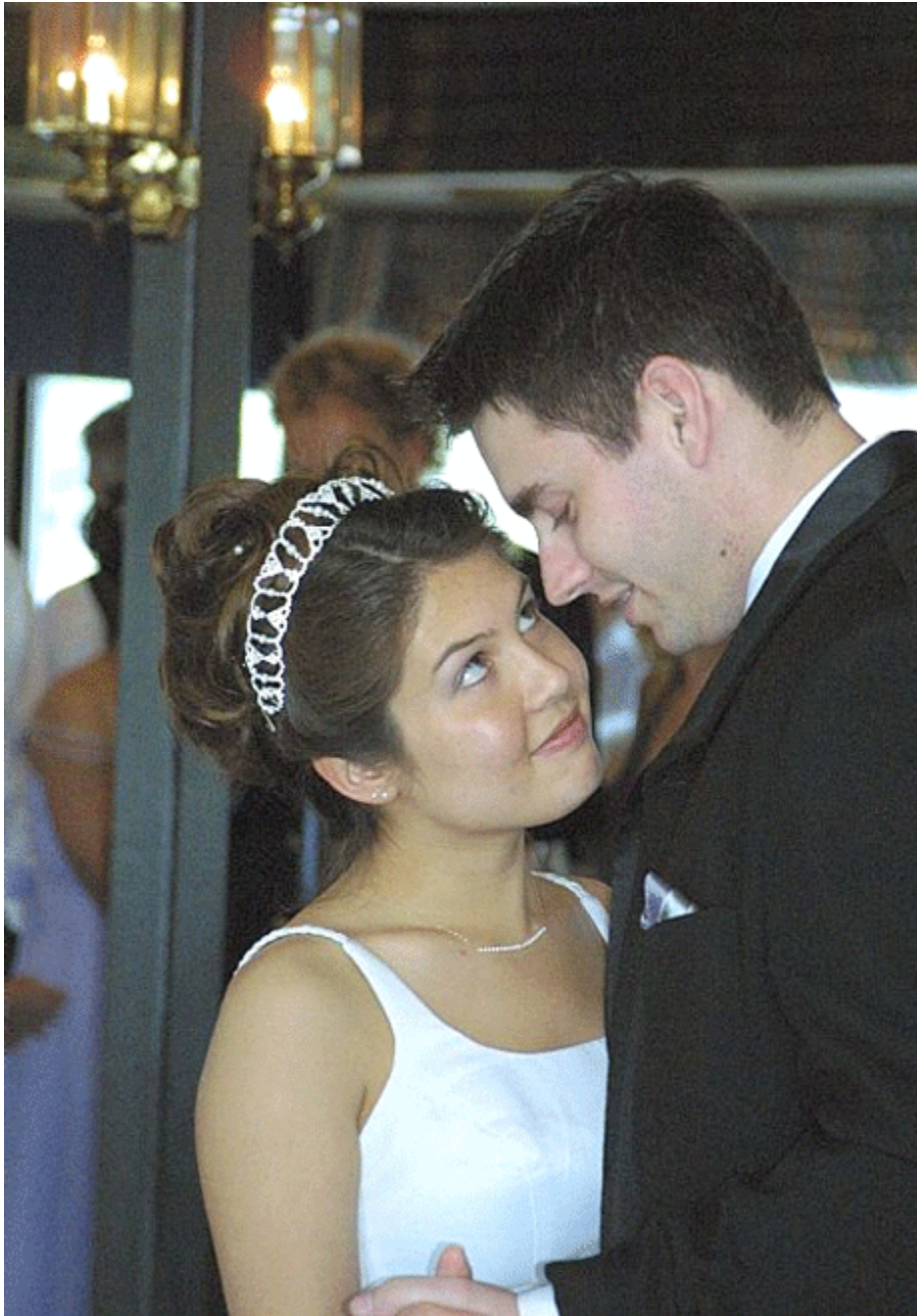


Sharing of cake and champagne are standards of wedding photography.



The dancing will generally be the end of your work. The first dance of the married couple, like Figure D, and the father's dance with the bride, as in Figure E, are mandatory shots.

**FIGURE D**



Their first dance as a married couple.

**FIGURE E**



Daddy's little girl is all grown up.

I'm sure the mother of the groom would appreciate a picture of her dancing with her son. Once you get those standards taken care of, you're pretty much at your discretion as to what other dancing shots to take.

Often times, couples will have Dollar Dances, in which guests pay a dollar or more to dance with the newly married couple. This is a good opportunity to get shots of people that are important to



the couple dancing with them, such as grandparents, wacky aunts, and so forth. You may want to discuss this with the couple ahead of time.

Once the formal dancing is over, the ball really gets rolling. This is the point where the silliness begins, usually with the tossing of the bouquet and the removal and tossing of the garter. Be sure to get pictures of both as in Figure F.

**FIGURE F**



Make sure to catch the tossing of the bouquet and garter.

Afterwards, the dance floor will open up for everyone and you'll begin to see things like the Chicken Dance, Macarena, Electric Slide, and all those other silly dances they do at wedding receptions. Get a few shots of the couple and guests engaging in idiocy in their formalwear, the crazier the better, then pack up your gear and enjoy yourself. It's been a long day and you've earned it.

## CHAPTER 9

# AFTER THE WEDDING

The bride and groom are, of course, going to want to see their pictures as soon as possible. If they're trotting off to their honeymoon, then you've got a little time, so don't sweat it. If not though, get your film developed (or read into your computer if you're doing this digitally) as soon as possible.

If you're shooting on film, it would be a good idea to number the back of the proofs and make a key for the negatives so they can be easily identified later for prints. Remove any obviously bad shots and get the proofs to the couple so they can pick the prints and sizes they want.

Have the prints made (or make them yourself) and your job is essentially complete. Some photographers will put the album together for the couple; others merely deliver the finished prints. Which you choose to do is between you and the couple. If you don't plan on doing any more wedding photography, then have a few prints made for yourself as mementos and give everything else to the couple.

If you want to continue with shooting weddings as the opportunity arises, then have double prints made of the proofs and number both sets. Keep one set, the negatives and key for yourself, and give the other set to the couple. If you're shooting digitally, it might be nice to give the couple their photos on CD-ROM as well, so they have the images for their digital library.

If you're a friend, you may want to give all the photos to the couple. But if you're doing this for money, you may want to engage in a practice as old as weddings (or at least as old as wedding photography). As you are now a budding wedding photographer, you may want your clients to come back to you if they want to buy extra prints.

### DOING IT YOURSELF

Just because a couple doesn't have a lot of money doesn't mean they don't deserve professional looking wedding photos. I was taught a long time ago that anything worth doing is worth doing well. This was never truer than wedding photography, because the events in a wedding only happen once. If you're willing to take on the responsibility of shooting a wedding, then you have an obligation to do the best job possible.

Knowing your equipment and preparation beforehand will go a long way to making your job a lot easier. Not every wedding will be as formal as the examples or necessarily follow the pattern I have outlined here, so find out ahead of time what the sequence of events will be.

You also need to have confidence in yourself. If you don't, you won't be able to command the shoot and direct people. But that doesn't mean being pompous, arrogant, or full of yourself either.

Be prepared for on the spot requests during the shoot. Do your best to accommodate them, but if time is becoming a factor, don't hesitate to let them know. Ultimately, try to relax, have fun, and make the best out of it.

Good luck and good shooting.

This has been a fun Solutions Guide to write. Each week, we provide lots of great tips, techniques, and product reviews about photography in Connected Photographer Magazine. Be sure to visit us there, at <http://www.ConnectedPhotographer.com>.



**Want more solutions?**

You can choose from our ever-growing selection of fabulous ZATZ Solutions Guides. Simply visit

**<http://store.ZATZ.com>**

and soon you'll have solutions for all your challenges.

**Site licenses**

Your purchase of this ZATZ Solutions Guide entitles you to print this guide and use it yourself. If you'd like to distribute either printed guides or .PDF files throughout your organization, please contact ZATZ at [sales@ZATZ.com](mailto:sales@ZATZ.com).